

# ARTISTIC BOARD-UP PROGRAM



{ NEIGHBORHOOD REVITALIZATION INITIATIVE }

DEPARTMENT OF CITY DEVELOPMENT (DCD)  
DEPARTMENT OF NEIGHBORHOOD SERVICES (DNS)  
NEIGHBORHOOD IMPROVEMENT DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION (NIDC)



# ARTISTIC BOARD-UP

## {PROGRAM OVERVIEW}

Artistic board-up is a neighborhood revitalization initiative that transforms vacant properties through creativity and community engagement. Artwork is applied to plywood boards that cover windows and doors of unoccupied structures. The art may reflect cultural or neighborhood traditions, abstract designs, a café or restaurant theme, or the boards may simply be transformed to appear as undamaged windows and doors making the structure appear as though it is still occupied to the casual observer.

DNS learned about artistic board-up at the Reclaiming Vacant Properties conference hosted by the Center for Community Progress. This event gathers community activists, leaders and officials from across the country who are committed to restoring the strength of neighborhoods through innovative reuse of vacant properties and exploring solutions for tackling the challenges of vacant and abandoned buildings.

Artistic board-up began its evolution in Milwaukee when DNS hosted a “Board-Up in a Box” workshop for community-based organizations last fall. The seminar focused on training community organizers about how to transform a vacant boarded property utilizing art to enhance the building’s appearance. The training also focused on tools and techniques needed to successfully implement an artistic board-up. By the end of the day workshop participants had transformed a vacant boarded home in the Franklin Heights neighborhood.

In December 2012, DNS partnered with Wells Fargo to sponsor the artistic board-up of ten city-owned residential and commercial properties, all located within Neighborhood Revitalization Strategy Areas. In February 2013, the Artistic Board-Up Program was displayed at the Mayor’s State of the City address and was also featured in the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel shortly thereafter.

Meanwhile, the community’s intrigue with artistic board-up continued to grow and the program gained momentum via several avenues. The first of which included various stakeholders such as non-profit organizations, residents, businesses, artists, city officials, and community partners approaching the City to become involved. From there DNS, DCD, and NIDC began to

work with community partners from the five hardest hit foreclosure neighborhoods to continue moving the initiative forward. A strategy was developed for the next stage of implementation which will come to fruition this summer. The third phase of artistic board-up will emerge at twenty properties within the hardest hit foreclosure neighborhoods: Amani, Metcalfe Park, Sherman Park, Washington Park and Thurston Woods. Additionally, community clean-up events will be held in conjunction with the artistic board-ups in each neighborhood.

The ongoing dialogue with stakeholders and community partners has led to discussion about seeking funding in order to expand the Artistic Board-Up program city-wide and collaborating to develop a collective framework that will impact nearly 500 city-owned vacant residential and commercial properties. The idea is to focus on community engagement just as much as the creative process of the program. Through implementing community-based artistic board-up installations and engaging residents as instrumental to these efforts, this program is a cost effective revitalization tool and an opportunity for residents and communities to enhance the appearance of neighborhoods and vacant buildings. The Artistic Board-Up program empowers communities to move in a forward direction by facilitating the process of healing from the effects of the foreclosure crises and reawakening a neighborhood’s potential as well as the unlimited possibilities of what a vacant building could potentially become.

The volume of community interest and growth of the Artistic Board-Up Program is evidence that a citywide installation will have a powerful impact. The goal is to help Milwaukee neighborhoods realize their greatest potential and take advantage of an opportunity to give residents a meaningful connection to vacant buildings. Artistic board-up, when combined with community engagement, is a powerful, creative, and cost-effective revitalization tool that reduces vandalism and blight by improving neighborhood morale and sparking potential economic interest and investment into the neighborhood. To conclude, artistic board-up is gaining rapid momentum and when one takes into consideration the untapped potential in Milwaukee neighborhoods and the unlimited possibilities that this revitalization initiative offers, it is easy to see why the Artistic Board-Up Program continues to grow and evolve.





# {EM}POWERFUL IMPACT



*inspire CREATIVITY*  
*engage COMMUNITY*  
*celebrate SUCCESS*

## empower **MILWAUKEE**

The Artistic Board-Up Program is not simply an aesthetic arts program. What makes artistic board-up such a powerful revitalization tool is the engagement and empowerment of neighborhoods by bringing together residents, stakeholders, and city departments to work together on a comprehensive community improvement project. Through coordinating this synergistic collaboration the city will connect communities with vacant and abandoned buildings and help to restore neighborhood morale. This initiative will cultivate further revitalization throughout the city through the camaraderie that will inevitably emerge. A citywide art installation that is inspired, commissioned, and implemented by community will instill a new sense of pride in Milwaukee residents and neighborhoods.

## engage **COMMUNITY**

The inspiration, renewal, and healing that will result from engaging neighborhoods in a successful and synergistic citywide artistic board-up installation will undoubtedly revitalize the city and individual communities by stabilizing areas with vacant and abandoned buildings. Artistic board-up turns eyesores into assets. Residents will be proud to live next to or walk through a neighborhood with unoccupied buildings brightened up by community-based artwork. A vacant property will no longer represent blight but rather an engaged and united neighborhood of proud, empowered residents.



**For more information  
please contact:**

**Vanessa Llanas**  
Community Outreach Liaison  
Neighborhood Improvement Development Corporation  
City of Milwaukee, Dept of City Development  
809 N Broadway, Milw, WI 53202  
Tel 414.286.5626  
vanessa.llanas@milwaukee.gov

**Regina Sims**  
Property Management Program Coordinator  
City of Milwaukee, Dept of Neighborhood Services  
841 N Broadway, RM 104, Milw, WI 53202  
Tel 414.286.8244  
resims@milwaukee.gov



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